**Gooseberry Park**

**Author: Cynthia Rylant**

**Illustrator**: Arthur Howard

**Summary**: Stumpy gives birth to her babies in a pin oak tree in Gooseberry Park. But when a chilling ice storm destroys the tree, Stumpy must find a new home for her family. One day she suddenly disappears, and her babies are left in the care of friends: Kona, the Labrador retriever, Gwendolyn, the hermit crab, and Murray, the bat. The friends then launch a search effort to find Stumpy. Will she ever be found? Will her babies ever have a home to call their own?

This heartwarming story reinforces the importance of family and close friends, and illustrator Howard's use of soft watercolors portrays the earth-toned beauty of the characters and their Gooseberry home. Cynthia Rylant's tale is a heartwarming story for the whole family.

Each night, ask your child a question to spark discussion around the dinner table! If you want, check the book out of the library and read along with us. To keep the enthusiasm and suspense, please don’t go farther than we have read in class.

**Chapter 1**: Tell me about the character of Stumpy. What were some things she liked to collect?

**Chapters 2 & 3**: Where did Gwendolyn and Kona live? What was their life like? Do you think they liked living with Professor Albert? Can you use some words to describe them and their life? (Remind your child that a describing word is called an adjective).

Ch**apter 4**: What kind of animal is Murray? (He is a bat. Ask your child to tell you about bats…they are nocturnal, they live in trees, they hang upside down, etc).

**Chapter 5**: What was it time for? (Stumpy to have her babies.)

**Chapter 6**: How was Stumpy’s life different now that she was a mother? (She was very busy now!)

**Chapter 7**: Tell me about the ice storm.

**Chapter 8**: What was the very big risk? (Kona went to look for Stumpy and her babies all on his own.

**Chapter 9**: Who did Kona rescue? Tell me about that.

**Chapter 10**: In this chapter, things don’t seem to be going well for Kona. How did this chapter make you feel? Were your worried? Sad? Hopeful?

**Chapter 11:** This chapter was mostly about Murray. Tell me about this funny character. What kind of trouble did he get into in this chapter? What does he really like?

**Chapter 12**: This chapter is called Food and Conversation. As Kona and Gwendolyn and Murray are trying to come up with a plan to help Stumpy and her babies, they are eating a lot of Professor Albert’s food. What do you do when you are worried or are trying to figure out how to solve a problem?

**Chapter 13 - 16**: Why do Kona, Gwendolyn, and Murray need to find the glow in the dark watch? Tell me how this plan worked to get Stumpy back?

**Chapter 17 - 18**: Tell me about Stumpy’s new home. If there was another chapter, what do you think would happen next?

**Discussion Questions for after the book is finished**:

Which character in the story are you most like and why?

What did you learn from this book?

Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not?

What was your favorite part? Why?

In this story, the babies get no role at all, and, of course, Stumpy is missing for half the book. Do you think the book would have been better if the babies had personalities and action? Why? What would you have had them do if you were the author?

**Themes in Gooseberry Park**

**Genre**: Animal fantasies are a rich genre for early novels. In these books, the animals have some human traits (they talk, they form friendships, and sometimes they wear clothing), but they retain

a good portion of their animal characteristics as well (For example, they sometimes tend to eat one another.) Name some other animal fantasies you have really enjoyed.

**Friendship**: This animal adventure features a most unlikely group of animal friends: a squirrel, a dog, a bat, and a hermit crab. Stumpy’s dog friend, Kona must rescue her and her children with the help of scatterbrained Murray the bat, and the advice of

Gwendolyn, the sage old Hermit Crab. What made the animals’ friendship so unique? Do people have the same kinds of friendships? Who was your favorite character? Why?

**Nesting instincts**: The book starts with an introduction to the nesting instinct in squirrels--squirrels because Stumpy the squirrel is having babies and needs to find a place for them all to live.

Have you ever heard the term “nesting instinct?” Do people have this same instinct? Give examples.

**Weather disasters**: Shortly after the babies are born, an ice storm blows havoc through the town and especially Gooseberry Park. A pin-oak tree topples over, casting the squirrel family and many other animals into danger. Did this disaster seem real? What made it so scary? Can you make a connection to something like this in your own life?

**Animal safety**: Stumpy disappears, leaving her friends Kona, the Chocolate Labrador Retriever, and, Murray, the bat, assisted by Gwendolyn, the hermit crab, to find Stumpy's babies and care for them until Stumpy can be found. How did Kona accomplish this amazing feat?

**Recycling**: In the story a Stumpy builds a nest for her expected babies with odd bits and pieces she finds in dumpsters and other places. What was her real “treasure”?

**Animal characters**: These characters are full of kindness, selflessness, loyalty, bravery and humor. Give an example from the book that shows one of these virtues?

**Humor**: What did you think was funny in this book?